

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 COME-00

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XMB-02 OPIC-03 SP-02 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 AGRE-00

DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SS-15 /109 W

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R 111417Z JAN 78

FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5806

INFO AMCONSUL IBADAN

AMCONSUL KADUNA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LAGOS 329

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ETRN, NI

SUBJECT: INCREASE IN LAGOS TRANSIT FARES CREATES MORE PROBLEMS

REF: (A) 77 LAGOS 15036, (B) 77 LAGOS 14806, (C) 77 LAGOS 14279,

(D) 77 KADUNA 1322, (E) LAGOS A-109 OF DECEMBER 10, 1977

1. SUMMARY: ON DECEMBER 31, LAGOS STATE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED CHANGES IN FARE STRUCTURE FOR LOCAL MASS TRANSIT SYSTEM WHICH PROVED UNPOPULAR WITH LOCAL TAXI DRIVERS AND BUS RIDING PUBLIC. RESULTING TENSIONS CULMINATED ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 5, WITH NEAR RIOTS IN CERTAIN AREAS OF THE MAINLAND AND VANDALISM OF GOVERNMENT OWNED BUSES. THESE AND OTHER DOMESTIC PROBLEMS DISCUSSED IN REFERENCES CAN BE EXPECTED OCCUPY A LARGE PORTION OF FMG'S ATTENTION IN NEXT FEW WEEKS AND WILL CONTINUE TO CREATE DISCONTENT AMONG MANY NIGERIANS. END SUMMARY.

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2. ON DECEMBER 31, THE LAGOS STATE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED THAT BUS FARES ON THE GOVERNMENT BUS SYSTEM WOULD INCREASE FROM 5 KOBO (US\$.075) TO 10 KOBO (US\$.15) FOR SHORT TRIPS. SINCE LONGER TRIPS NORMALLY REQUIRE THE PAYMENT OF A SERIES OF SHORT TRIP FARES, JOURNEYS TO AND FROM THE OUTER SUBURBS INCREASED IN COST FROM 20 KOBO (US\$.30) TO 40 KOBO (US\$.60). THE STATE GOVERNMENT ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT TAXIS MUST INSTALL

METERS FOR CALCULATION OF FARES -- RETURNING TO A SYSTEM DISCONTINUED IN THE LATE 1960'S.

2. TAXI DRIVERS REACTED FIRST BY WITHDRAWING THEIR CABS FROM THE ROADS ON MONDAY, JANUARY 2. DRIVERS WERE UNHAPPY WITH THE REQUIREMENT TO INSTALL METERS, WHICH WOULD FORCE THEM TO CHARGE EQUAL FARES TO ALL PASSENGERS RATHER THAN TO INFLATE PRICES FOR THE WELL-TO-DO NIGERIANS AND EXPATRIATES. WE UNDERSTAND THERE WERE A FEW INCIDENTS THAT DAY INVOLVING CAB DRIVERS WHO INITIALLY REFUSED TO JOIN THE BOYCOTT. MOST CABS WERE APPARETNLY BACK IN OPERATION ON TUESDAY.

3. AT THE SAME TIME OWNERS OF PRIVATELY OPERATED 'BUSES---VOLKSWAGEN BUSES AND MAMMY WAGONS--TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO RAISE FARES FROM 10 TO 15 KOBO PER SHORT TRIP. THE STATE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED THAT INCREASED FARES HAD NOT BEEN APPROVED FOR PRIVATE BUSES.

4. ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 5, PRIVATE BUS OWNERS CALLED A STRIKE TO PROTEST THE GOVERNMENT'S DENIAL OF A RATE INCREASE TO THE PRIVATE BUSES. SOME DRIVERS DID NOT COMPLY WITH THE STRIKE AND THERE WERE INCIDENTS IN WHICH ALLEGEDLY SOME PRIVATE BUSES WERE BURNED.

5. IN APPARENTLY SEPARATE BUT COINCIDENTAL INCIDENTS,
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PEOPLE PROTESTING PUBLIC BUS FARE INCREASES VANDALIZED SEVEN PUBLIC BUSES IN YABA AND SURULERE, DEFLATING THE TIRES OF TWO AND DOING EXTENSIVE DAMAGE TO FIVE OTHERS. TEMPORARY ROADBLOCKS WERE THROWN UP IN CERTAIN AREAS USING OLD

VEHICLES AND THE ACCUMULATED JUNK WHICH LINES THE STREETS OF MAINLAND LAGOS. IN SOME CASES THE ROADBLOCKS WERE SET ON FIRE. REPORTEDLY, TEAR GAS WAS USED TO DISPERSE CROWDS IN AT LEAST ONE LOCATION.

6. EMBASSY POLITICAL/LABOR ASSISTANT VISITED DR. L. A. BALOGUN, LAGOS STATE COMMISSIONER FOR SPECIAL DUTIES WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE TRANSPORT SYSTEM, ON THE EVENING OF JANUARY 5. HE SAID THAT POLICE REPORTS INDICATED TENSIONS WERE HIGH BUT THE SITUATION WAS UNDER CONTROL. AS A RESULT OF THE DIFFICULTIES, HE HAD RECOMMENDED THAT THE STATE RESCIND THE FARE INCREASES. HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT THE TAXIS WILL BE REQUIRED TO INSTALL METERS AS THE STATE GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY RECEIVED DELIVERY ON 3,000 METERS AND CANNOT RETURN THEM.

7. BALOGUN'S RECOMMENDATION TO RESCIND THE INCREASES WAS NOT

ACCEPTED BY THE STATE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL WHICH FELT THAT EFFORTS MUST BE MADE TO ELIMINATE THE NAIRA 40,000 MONTHLY DEFICIT OF THE PUBLIC BUS SYSTEM. IN ORDER TO ALLEVIATE AT LEAST ONE ASPECT OF THE PROBLEM, THE COUNCIL DID, HOWEVER, APPROVE A SIMILAR INCREASE IN FARES FOR THE PRIVATE BUS SYSTEM. THIS DECISION WAS ANNOUNCED ON SATURDAY JANUARY 7. WHILE IT WILL DEFUSE COMPLAINTS FROM THE BETTER ORGANIZED GROUP OF PROTESTORS -- THE PRIVATE BUS OWNERS --, IT LEAVES THE AVERAGE MAN WHO BEARS THE BRUNT OF INCREASED COSTS AND THE TAXI DRIVERS DISSATISFIED. BEFORE THE STATE'S DECISION BECAME WIDELY KNOWN, ANOTHER NON-VIOLENT DEMONSTRATION OCCURRED OVER THE WEEKEND WITH PROTEST MARCH IN YABA BY BUS

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USERS.

8. SINCE MOST FRESH FOOD IN THE LAGOS AREA IS MOVED BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT, ONE SIDE EFFECT OF THE FARE INCREASE IS AN INCREASE IN FOOD PRICES. REPORTEDLY SOME OF THE MARKET PEOPLE HAVE CAPITALIZED ON THE JUSTIFIABLE INCREASE AND RAISED PRICES AS MUCH AS 50 PERCENT. THE INCREASE IN FOOD PRICES, COUPLED WITH THE NORMAL CHRISTMAS INCREASE, HAS GENERATED FURTHER COMPLAINTS. FOR EXAMPLE, A KEROSENE TIN OF GARI (GROUND CASSAVE, A LOCAL STAPLE), WHICH COST NAIRA 1.20 IN 1975 AND NAIRA 8 IN NOVEMBER 1977, HAD INCREASED TO NAIRA 12 IN LATE DECEMBER 1977 AND REPORTEDLY

THE PRICE ROSE AGAIN LAST WEEK.

9. COMMENT: RECENT MISSION REPORTING HAS REFLECTED THE DOMESTIC PROBLEMS WHICH HAVE PLAGUED THE FMG IN RECENT MONTHS. WHILE THE FUEL SHORTAGE REPORTED IN KADUNA'S REF D HAS BEEN ALLEVIATED IN THE SOUTH, THE POWER SHORTAGE IS EXPECTED TO CONTINUE FOR MONTHS AS REPORTED LAGOS REF C. CONFIDENTIAL

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NIGERIA AIRWAYS FLIGHTS WERE EVEN MORE ERRATIC THAN USUAL IN DECEMBER BECAUSE OF FUEL SHORTAGES AND OTHER PROBLEMS. (SEE LAGOS REF A). MAIL SERVICE HAS ALSO DETERIORATED IN RECENT WEEKS WITH THE POST OFFICE OUT OF STAMPS IN LATE DECEMBER AND DESTRUCTION OF PART OF THE MAIN POST OFFICE IN LAGOS BY A MAJOR FIRE ON CHRISTMAS DAY. RECENT DAO REPORTING HAS ALSO NOTED POLICE/MILITARY AND POLICE/CIVILIAN CONFRONTATIONS. AS REPORTED REFS B AND E THERE HAS ALSO BEEN A DETERIORATION IN PHYSICAL SECURITY AND FOOD DISTRIBUTION, AS WELL AS INCREASED INFLATION IN RECENT MONTHS.

10. ALL OF THESE PROBLEMS ARE LIKELY TO INCREASINGLY DRAW THE ATTENTION OF HIGH FMG OFFICIALS AWAY FROM INTERNATIONAL ISSUES AND LONGER RANGE CONCERNS SUCH AS THE RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE.

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